



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Annual Fulbright Presentation Dinner

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**Remarks by Ambassador Jeffrey Bleich  
at the Annual Fulbright Presentation Dinner  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne**

*(Remarks as prepared for delivery – March 18, 2010)*

Thank you, Vice Chancellor Davis, for your kind introduction and thank you Joe Hlubucek, the Fulbright Executive Director Hlubucek and Fulbright Board Chair Tom Pascarella. We're grateful to you and your staffs for all of their hard work that has made this evening so special.

Welcome Australian and American Fulbright Scholars,

Alumni of the Fulbright program, Sponsors of Fulbright scholarships, Friends of Fulbright, and everybody else that Glyn mentioned.

I am honored and delighted to be with you tonight to celebrate a landmark Anniversary in this landmark museum in beautiful Melbourne. I hope you take a moment during dinner – or even during my speech – to look up and take in the magnificent stained glass ceiling and the art works around us. It is a very Fulbright thing to do.

Tonight we welcome many 2009 and 2008 U.S. Fulbright Scholars who are with us here tonight. But most of all we're here to congratulate the stars of tonight's show, the outstanding Australians who have been selected as 2010 Fulbright Scholars.

Whether you are a young scholar or a seasoned professor you already have demonstrated a great gift.

Indeed, this room has an amazing collection of brain power tonight. It reminds me of a remark President Kennedy made when he hosted a gathering of Noble laureates at the White House. He said, "This is the most extraordinary collection of talent and of human knowledge that has ever been gathered together in one room – with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone!" Since we know Thomas Jefferson never made it to this room, I think I'm safe in saying, without qualification, that this is one of the most extraordinary collections of talent and human knowledge to gather in this room.



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What I'm struck by tonight is that this great achievement – the 60th Anniversary of the Fulbright program – began out of tragedy. When Senator Fulbright first conceived of this program, the world was emerging from the terrible devastation of World War II, and dealing with its trauma.

I go to ceremonies honoring the veterans of WWII and meet them, or their families, and they talk about the spirit of men fighting together and seeing their friends die together in the bombing of Darwin or the Battle of the Coral Sea. I see in their memories today what Senator Fulbright must have seen all around him 60 years ago. A band of young people, strangers, thrown together in far-flung areas unexpectedly, became bound by deep bonds of faith, trust, and mutual respect. Americans and Australians in war didn't care where the other guy went to school or what they did for a living or what kind of music they liked. They cared about character - they had one question: "is this someone I can trust with my life." Americans and Australians discovered in each other a strong character and a common ethic - that you follow through, that you don't rattle under pressure, and that you are willing to sacrifice for the good of others.

This beautiful connection emerging from the tragedy of war, is what the poet William Butler Yeats captured in his poem during an earlier world war. And I promised one of the new Fulbright scholars – a poet – that I'd recite it:

Yeats wrote:

*I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn:  
All changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.*

"A terrible beauty is born." From the terrible fields and shores where young people were killed and disfigured and lost, we also discovered a beauty - an appreciation of what matters, of the ability to build trust and understanding across a great divide.

In September 1945, Fulbright, a mere freshman senator from Arkansas, introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress literally to turn our swords into plowshares. He proposed that we



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use proceeds from the sales of surplus war property to fund the “promotion of international goodwill through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture and science.” Today, 60 years later, we celebrate the wisdom of that vision – which has spawned 4600 scholars and produced our great alliance, and a world in which both Australia and America have turned old rivals into our friends.

Fulbright’s insight was that bonds could and should be formed without battle. That we can find beauty other ways. Not all beauty need to be a terrible beauty.

Human progress occurs when we experience new things, bring fresh eyes to old challenges, and when we collaborate. Think of what it is like when you travel some place for the first time. We go somewhere we’ve never been before – and we see it with fresh, intense eyes, and bring a new perspective to that world. We learn a different language and we discover that words exist for thoughts that had been left unformed in our minds. We arrive in a place wary of others and discover how normal things are – that they, like us, love their children, are modest in their expectations, and have meaning in their customs and habits. It is these moments of revelation and demystification, that throughout history have sparked the engine of human progress.

We discover that we are not separated by a great ocean, we are joined by it. We share everything from goods to ideas to music tastes to movies or clothes. The list of the ways our countries work together is more than the sum of its parts. It reflects a deeper bond, built by generations. Simply put, we share so much because at a fundamental level we get along. We admire people who take their work seriously without taking themselves too seriously. We share a perspective and a sense of humor that helps us understand each other. I should say that we mostly share a sense of humor. I’m not sure that I’ve lived here long enough to get Kath and Kim.

Because of this unique “mate-ship” we can solve problems that other nations can’t. Edward R. Murrow, the famous journalist, once said that the most difficult part of diplomacy is the last three feet, the distance of a handshake. But because of Fulbright and the bonds it reflects, this has not been my experience as a diplomat in Australia at all. Americans and Australians want to shake hands, we want to get the job done.

This achievement is your work, and the work of those who came before us: people who realized, regardless of who was in power, regardless of what the issues of the day were, that we are all better off together than we would ever be apart.

So let me end with this scientific truth that makes my point better than words ever could. Long before J. William Fulbright recognized it, and back to the dawn of time, the people of the world have always been linked. We are all made up of the same atoms that have swirled through all races and nationalities and every planet and galaxy since the



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beginning of time. The writer Bill Bryson has helped put this connection across time and space in concrete terms: “The nuclei of every atom you possess has almost certainly passed through several stars and been a part of millions of organisms on its way to becoming you. We are each so full of atoms and those atoms are so vigorously recycled that up to a billion atoms in each of us probably once belonged to Shakespeare.”

Yeah, I know, I couldn’t believe this fact either, so I checked out the Jupiter scientific website. As I suspected, it said that Bryson was probably wrong when he estimated that each living person on earth had a billion of Shakespeare’s atoms in them. It is likely that each of us has about *200 billion atoms* that were once in Shakespeare’s body! So the truth is that there is a little bit of Shakespeare in all of us. A little Australian and a little American and Chinese and African and Indian and Portuguese and Mexican and Aborigine in all of us.

Each new generation must rediscover these old truths for themselves. Fulbright is one way we do that. So to our scholars tonight, it is your turn to maintain, and reimagine, and rejuvenate our partnership to take on the unique challenges that await us. By accepting this scholarship you take on the mantle of ensuring that our partnership stays strong and relevant into the future. And for that, I congratulate you on all that you have done, and I thank you for all that you will do.